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ABSTRACT

This article explores the relationship between notions of development and practice in early education. Through an interpretive study of the experience of the "gift of time," the article follows small groups of children who delayed kindergarten entry, those who were relatively young but entered on time, and children retained in kindergarten to gain an understanding of how time promotes development. The article examines how ideas about typical development override attention to individual development. Further, such ideas promote a teacher-distant approach in which opportunities to scaffold learning are frequently missed. The article suggests heightened attention to developmentally responsive practice—practice that utilizes both knowledge of typical development and particular knowledge of specific children. (Author)

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The Gift of Time: Enactments of Developmental Thought in Early Childhood Practice

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Abstract

This article explores the relationship between notions of development and practice in early education. Through an interpretive study of the experience of the "gift of time," the article follows small groups of children who delayed kindergarten entry, those who were relatively young but entered on time, and children retained in kindergarten to gain an understanding of how time promotes development. The article examines how ideas about typical development override attention to individual development. Further, such ideas promote a teacher-distant approach in which opportunities to scaffold learning are frequently missed. The article suggests heightened attention to *developmentally responsive practice*—practice that utilizes both knowledge of typical development and particular knowledge of specific children.

Introduction

Early childhood practice is framed by two distinct and sometimes contradictory ideas. On the one hand, there is a commitment to a developmental approach to learning (Katz, 1997), in which development is seen as patterned, episodic, and uneven. From this perspective, we have expectations for children at given ages that guide our practice (Kohlberg & Mayer, 1972). On the other hand, there is strongly held belief that early educators meet children where they are—that development is lived individually, requiring adaptation to a child's needs, interests, and abilities. The notion of the *child-centered curriculum*, so prevalent in mainstream early childhood discourse, holds that productive experiences for young children are linked to what particular children need at specific times (Lay-Dopyera & Dopyera, 1990; Schweinhart, 1988). These two themes are key aspects of the structural framework of *developmentally appropriate practice* (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).

In this paper, we use the potentials and tensions of ideas about teaching and development as tools to help us understand practices related to kindergarten readiness. In an effort to understand the experience of the

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gift of time (Ames, 1986; Ames & Chase, 1974), a strategy that provides additional time for maturation, we followed the experiences of children who delayed kindergarten entry, those who were relatively young but entered on time, and children retained in kindergarten. We found that the tension between developmental expectations and individual needs was key to understanding decision making, curriculum planning, and evaluation of students over the course of a year. This paper focuses on the following questions: *Just how elastic are our notions of development? How does a normative approach shape the possibilities for meeting the needs of individual children?*

Time and Development

Typical development and individual expression are the yin and yang of early childhood practice. They provide the broad scope and specific potential for response while recognizing that "average or norms never tell more than a small part of the story; far more informative is the range, that is, how individuals' levels of growth or performance are distributed" (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). With this explanation of development, there is theoretical room for children who do not fit the typical expectations for growth. But what are the pedagogical responses for children who do not fit developmental expectation in practice?

The notion of readiness connects development to the requirements of a particular context. Used in relation to the start of formal schooling, it depicts the degree to which a child is capable of benefiting from the goals, expectations, and activities of a kindergarten program (Graue, 1993b; Meisels, 1999). When readiness is an issue for an individual child, two interventions are frequently suggested that are premised on allowing time for development. The first, *academic redshirting*, involves delaying entry to kindergarten so that a child will have more time to grow and develop. The second, *kindergarten retention*, is used for children who are already in the kindergarten context who are not making adequate progress. A second year in kindergarten provides more time for maturation and acquisition of skills.

It is estimated that about 7% of kindergartners are redshirted and about 5% are retained each year (Graue & DiPerna, 2000; Zill, Loomis, & West, 1997). Kindergartners who are redshirted tend to be boys and the youngest in a kindergarten age cohort. These children are often viewed as socially immature, and they come from affluent families (Graue & DiPerna, 2000; Graue, Kroeger, & Brown, 2000; Shepard, Graue, & Catto, 1989; Zill, Loomis, & West, 1997). In contrast, kindergarten children who are retained are typically boys of color, and they come from poor families and their families talk about early developmental delays (Byrd, Weitzman, & Auinger, 1997; Graue & DiPerna, 2000; Zill, Loomis, & West, 1997).

Although children who are redshirted have a slight, temporary academic advantage until third grade, children who are retained rarely close the gap with their grademates (Cameron & Wilson, 1990; Graue & DiPerna, 2000; Morrison, Griffith, & Alberts, 1997; Shepard & Smith, 1986). Rates of special education placement and parent-reported social and behavioral difficulties are higher than expected for children who are redshirted and children who are retained despite the proposed protective nature of the interventions (Byrd, Weitzman, & Auinger, 1997; Graue & DiPerna, 2000; Karweit & Wasik, 1994; May, Kundert, & Brent, 1995; Zill, Loomis, & West, 1997).

The literature on time-based interventions provides a window on the relations between developmental thought and educational practice. It gives a sense of the parameters of inclusion for children who are not developing as expected. In the rest of the paper, we present a project that examines this issue in a local context. We explore the elasticity of notions of development as young children make the transition into elementary school.

Research Methods

This study was designed to explore the experiences of children who are typically seen to have readiness risks. It focused on experiences of children who were eligible for kindergarten but who were spending an additional year in preschool (redshirts), children who entered school on time who were relatively young,

and children who were repeating kindergarten (retainees).

Children who were delaying kindergarten were solicited through letters to local day care centers, preschools, and pediatricians. Twenty parents volunteered for the study, and from this group, we selected five who were chosen to represent the typical gender breakdown (predominantly boys), a range of care settings (part-day nursery school, home day care, and full-time center-based care), and geographic location (a local range but within reasonable driving distance).

We identified each redshirt's intended kindergarten school and approached those schools for agemate and retainee participants, linking the sampling of the three groups in recognition of the community orientations to readiness (Graue, 1993a). We were able to get good matches for four of five agemates (same sex and birth quartile). In the fifth case, the teachers who were willing to work with us had few boys who had summer birthdays so we chose a child from the spring quartile. Retention is a very low incidence strategy in the school districts, and we were able to locate only three retainees for the project across four elementary schools.

The redshirts were white and middle class, while the retainees were more on the border of working class and middle class. These characteristics are in line with folk wisdom and research that redshirting is a practice of the relatively affluent (Shepard, 1991; Shepard, Graue, & Catto, 1989; Zill, Loomis, & West, 1997). The participants are described in Table 1. All names are pseudonyms. Within the sample of 14 children, we worked in 8 distinct schools/centers, across 2 school districts, in public and parochial elementary schools, and family day care, part-time nursery school, and full-time day care.

Table 1
Project Participants

Redshirt	Agemate	Retainee
Susan White female, 9/1/94 Home day care Jenny—Home day care provider Joe—Computers	Cindy White female, 7/27/94 St. Thomas Elementary—Jane Babbs Rene—Pediatrician Bob—Lawyer	Paula White female, 5/6/93 Frank Elementary (1st K attendance at St. Thomas) Lacy Newberry Lilly—Unemployed printer Ken—Dental repair technician
Jacob White male, 7/1/94 Oliver Heights Nursery School Andrea—Stay home mom (library science) Carl—University professor/scientist	Richard White male, 7/15/94 Oliver Heights Elementary—Valerie S Miriam—Stay home mom (computer design) Joe—University researcher	
Ford White male, 8/21/94 Oliver Heights Nursery School—Sarah Overton Amy—Teacher Paul—Videotape operator sports	Larry White male, 8/25/94 Elm Grove Elementary—Wendy Connor Jane—Part-time accounting Jason—Self-employed sales, advertising	Rusty White male, 8/25/93 Elm Grove Elementary—Amy Smith Linda—Interior design Pat—Farming (?)
Mick White male, 8/6/94 Oliver Heights Nursery School—Rhonda Paula—Dentist Rod—Vice-president, sales, marketing	Andy White male, 7/16/94 Elm Grove Elementary—Stephanie Walker Daria—Public relations, marketing Martin—Sales	Sean White male, 2/22/93 Elm Grove Elementary—Wendy Connor Leah Burchill—Lab technician
Nate White male, 8/22/94 University Day Care—Angel, Faye	Malcolm Biracial male, 4/8/94 Larkspur Elementary—Sena, Lucy	

Linda—Librarian Howard—Educational software producer	Mena—Administrative assistant	
	Alan White male, 3/25/94 Larkspur Elementary—Sarai, Salli Lena—Stay home mom (nursing/library science) John—Physician	

For each child, we interviewed parents, teachers, school administrators, and children, focusing on general beliefs and practices related to kindergarten readiness and discussions about particular children's experiences. These interviews lasted from 25 to 50 minutes and were taped and transcribed. Research assistants observed in each educational setting across the span of the academic year (with an average of 8 observations per child), focusing on the focal child, his or her interactions, and the nature of the educational activities. These field notes were shared with educators on a regular basis as a form of member check.

This paper relies primarily on the interview data and is supported by traditional strategies of qualitative inquiry (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Codes were generated inferentially and deductively, applying theoretical notions to the data and constructing themes from within the data (Graue & Walsh, 1998). We then worked to validate these themes by looking for supporting and disconfirming evidence. We developed memos (Graue & Walsh, 1998) to illustrate conceptual themes and compared these themes with the field note and interview evidence. Triangulation of interpretations was used across researchers and data sources. We organized a narrative that represents the parenting and teaching practice in which the participating children lived their lives. We present those themes in the next section.

The Kindergarten Prototype

> At that point, she was looking like a child who was much more ready to begin kindergarten, so we really feel that this was the good step to take for Paula. She's matured more this year. Her size is appropriate for a kindergartner right now. She's much more comfortable with the classroom right now. Last year, her first year of kindergarten, she was much more silly and immature for her classroom. She's definitely grown in this area. I would say she was much more a *true kindergartner* this year repeating kindergarten than she looked last year. (Kathleen Osborne, Paula's speech teacher, RK[1])

Discussions and teaching practices in both the preschool and kindergarten settings were organized around a notion of a *kindergarten prototype.* This image of the typical kindergartner oriented decision making in ways that could be interpreted as very developmental. It is keyed to conceptions of the typical development of 5-year-olds and is multidimensional in its framing. The kindergarten prototype was organized by perceived attributes of kindergarten children and assumptions about how programming and parenting should meet child need. It was shaped by the normative practices of institutions, which enacted the expectations of "kindergarten-ness." We take a close look at the kindergarten prototype, elaborating the model suggested by Paula's speech teacher and extending its description across children and contexts.

Age

> Knowledge of typical development of children within the age span served by the program provides a general framework to guide how teachers prepare the learning environment and plan realistic curriculum goals and objectives and appropriate experiences. (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997)

Given our focus on age-related interventions, the pervasiveness of age in discussions of the kindergarten prototype should come as little surprise. The model of a prototypical kindergartner favored the older kindergartner and was suspicious about the potential of younger kindergartners. Rick Webster, the principal at Richard's elementary school, asserted that teachers could pick out those young ones, even without birthdate information:

> [K]indergarten teachers here routinely tell me that they can identify, without data, who the summer birthdays are, and they recognize that those children frequently are behind the other kids for most of the kindergarten year. They may catch up in later years. Even second- or third-grade teachers will sometimes tell me that they can identify who the summer birthdays are or the early entrants. Talk about a subject that most teachers are not wild about! (Rick Webster, principal, Oliver Heights Elementary, Richard's school, AM)

We might expect early educators to have knowledge of age characteristics. What was interesting to us was the negative spin put on youngness. The label of "young" was *not* a compliment. It foretold a lifetime of problems. Mr. Webster articulated the age-based model:

> The children are just simply less mature than their classmates. In some cases, a child will even look a little less mature or smaller or younger. But, most of the time, they are talking about behaviors that give a child away. Silliness when the other children are more serious, length of attention span.... There are times when teachers have a feeling or I have a feeling that the reason a child isn't stepping up to the next level of understanding of an area is that they simply don't have the maturity to understand the more sophisticated concepts and to get into more abstract kinds of things. (Rick Webster, principal Oliver Heights Elementary, AM)

Here, younger means less acceptable. There is a threshold for acceptable behavior that includes physical and social maturity, focus, and cognitive structures that allow learning. A younger child is not likely to have all of these attributes, and teachers can see it. Acceptance of developmental variability is limited, with youngness a deficit that is hard to overcome.

Although treated as an absolute, age has an inherent relativity to it—youngness takes on a meaning in its comparison to older, more mature classmates. Wendy Connor, Larry's teacher, framed age as a competitive disadvantage:

> It's hard for him, because he's competing against kids who have turned 6 already. And that's hard, because they just have that little bit more under their belt of controlling their body, controlling themselves. The coordination, things like learning how to tie your shoes, well it's a whole lot easier if you've had that kind of stuff. (Wendy Connor, Larry's kindergarten teacher, fall, AM)

The relative effects of age were paired with a developmental conception of emotional growth in which children were seen as "getting stuck." They were unable to move beyond an immature level because they were in a context with children who were much more sophisticated and working at a higher level:

> Throughout the course of the year, we will sometimes see what I refer to as "meltdowns" on the emotional level. They go along beautifully academically and all of a sudden they hit a glitch emotionally, and it's like a huge stumbling block for the kids. And you never quite know when it's going to happen. It's like they have reached a plateau, and they just can't get beyond it at this point. Because agewise, there might be a full two-year spread in that class: someone who started later and someone who's got the earlier admission. (Maria O'Neil, principal, St. Thomas Elementary, AM, RK)

Age had both individual and social dimensions. It was a physical and maturational threshold, and it was relational because its meaning was made in part by their local comparison group.

The concept of a kindergartner could be so strongly held that stories were constructed to explain divergence. Paula, a retainee, had been adopted from Russia at 22 months. Everyone believed that the birth certificate must be wrong because Paula did not seem like a kindergartner the first time around. At the beginning of this section, we shared her speech teacher's notion of a true kindergartner. Her mother concurred, voicing serious doubt about the validity of the birth certificate provided in the international adoption:

> I have to wonder in the back of my mind, if she is truly 6 years old.... They told us what her birthday was, but, you know, throughout the whole process, they could have revised dates or anything if they wanted her to get out of the country and have a better life. And what if they moved her age up by six months? Who would know? Not to say that it is true, but right now she is the average height and weight of a kindergartner.... Not to say that kids can't be smaller than one another, but even emotionally and mentality wise—the whole works. It's like—maybe she's now only 5. (Lilly Katz, Paula's mother, RK)

The age-based expectations in the kindergarten prototype were so compelling that difference was explained through invalid documentation.[2] Behaviors and size could not be wrong, but papers could be.

Parents, teachers, and administrators held conceptions of the prototypical kindergartner that were built on typical age expectations. What was typical became the norm and defined deviance. Although all the children met the legal requirements for kindergarten entrance, the normative notions of the prototypical kindergartner made youngness a hazard. Although this view of the youngest is typical,[3] it seems curious that teachers of young children would have such a coherent negative image of their youngest students. It may be in part because of other aspects of the kindergarten prototype.

Stamina

> [whispers] Mom really wants him to take this nap. [Normal tone] I have said to myself, mom and dad have to realize that there are 16 other kids and that I can't make him nap. I've tried telling him, "This is the place that you need to go, you need to lay here. Mom and dad have talked to you about resting quietly. They want you to sleep." They want me to put him in a corner with no books away from everybody. But he's the *chattiest, most disruptive one of the bunch*! [Laughter] He falls apart when he gets home because he's tired. And, you know, I think that is some of the age. He's just turned 5; he was taking 3-hour naps at home. So that transition of, you're growing, your body is still developing, and now you're stretching it in all these different areas. (Wendy Connor, Larry's kindergarten teacher, AM)

Needing a personal break involving sleep was a physical indicator of immaturity. Five-year-olds should be in the transitional period in which they no longer needed naps. This expectation took on special salience with a recent move to full-day kindergarten programming. Several of the parents of redshirted children linked their decision to delay entry to their fears about their child's ability to handle the rigors of a full day of school:

> His grade school only has full-day kindergarten. And that was a big factor too. He still naps during the day. I cannot imagine him in kindergarten *everyday, full day*. 'Cause he's never had structure like that, and he is very much a homebody.... I just couldn't see him being younger, I wasn't sure if he could handle it. (Amy Sanderson, Ford's mother, RS)

Napping was an indicator of youngness. It was one of those physical, biological indicators that immutably implied developmental level. Needing a nap meant needing to be home.

In almost all cases, the need for a nap was a behavioral characteristic with a physical interpretation—being tired was a physical manifestation of youngness and therefore an indicator of risk. It was connected to a sense of social competence because children who were overtired often overreacted to classroom or home situations. It was correlated with a global notion of maturity in important ways that will be highlighted in

the next section.

Maturity

> Most of the young students that come in the early 5s, they tend to cry easily, they are frustrated easily, somebody says something to them they are not as able to take any kind of comments. They tattle a lot, they want attention, they want comfort from the teacher. (Jane Babbs, Cindy's teacher, St. Thomas Elementary, AM, RK)

Prototypical kindergartners had a social maturity that facilitated interaction. They could fend for themselves without relying on adults and were easy to get along with. Parents and educators were unanimous in pairing maturity with easy-going traits that helped them be a member of the group. They were independent but social—flexible leaders who knew how to engage their peers.

When Cindy's mother was thinking about her daughter's entry to school, she focused primarily on the social aspect of her daughter's development, on confidence and flexibility rather than on particular academic skills:

> I think social readiness is really the biggest key, rather than the academic skills, whether she can count or not, or know her alphabet wasn't really going to change my mind as to whether she was ready to go. But if she had the social skills to go to school, meet friends, be comfortable, handle a new situation, and not get so stressed out, I felt like she could succeed. If she had not been emotionally mature enough to handle a social situation, I would have thought about holding her back. (Rene Johnson, Cindy's mother, fall, AM)

Immaturity was often a catchall phrase for quirks that manifested themselves in unusual behaviors. Jacob, a redshirt, was known as a "hand licker." His teacher Sarah portrayed his orality developmentally, an indicator of youngness:

> He is really oral. Young kids seem to be really oral. Like today—I don't know if it was after snack, or what, he just started licking his hands instead of going to wash them off. And I saw that, and I said, "Jake, since you are done with snack, you need to go and wash your hands." (Sarah, Jacob's teacher, Oliver Heights Nursery School, RS)

An unusual behavior was normalized within the kindergarten prototype, moved from an idiosyncrasy to a step along the developmental path that indicated where a student was relative to a typically developing child.

Despite early childhood educators' advocacy of mixed-age groupings (Katz, Evangelou, & Hartman, 1990), interacting across age lines holds quite normative interpretations. Teachers and parents used child choice of playmate as an indicator of "true" developmental level, something that could help gauge social maturity. Playing with younger children was taken up as a risk marker, interacting with older children an indicator of social strength. Nate's teacher justified the redshirting decision by the company Nate kept, and Andy's mother felt that his choice of friends showed his social maturity:

> [L]ast year, I would say that he hung out with the kids that were not going off to kindergarten as much as he hung out with the kids that he is friends with now. And that was a good telltale sign, say, he was with kids that were not quite his age. That was a good sign to say he probably was not ready for kindergarten. (Angel, Nate's teacher, RS)

> He tends to play with the kids that are almost a year older. I think of his three or four best buds, they are almost a year older, and that is whom he seems to gravitate to. Two of them are in his class, and they are almost but not quite a full year probably 9 months older. (Daria Bowers, Andy's mother, AM)

Maturity was a multidimensional characteristic, located primarily in the social realm. It portrayed someone confident, interactive, independent, and age appropriate.

Work Habits

> He has a better work ethic I think than a lot of the other kids. He likes to do a job, and he pretty much likes to do a job well if he is going to do it. He is not one to really rush through something to get it done. I really feel like that he takes pride in what he is doing. And he accepts it for what it is and wants to do a good job with it, and I think that is a strength that he has that some of the others don't. He is pretty able to tune out distractions too and not go along with it and maybe that is because he is kind of task oriented. (Sarai Welstone, Alan's kindergarten teacher, AM)

The final aspect of the prototypical kindergartner could be seen as the intersection of child characteristics and institutional practice—it relates to the work habits that characterize a good student. Pairing ideas about what a typical kindergartner can do and the needs of classrooms and teachers, both parents and educators depicted a child who was independent but compliant. This child was adaptable to the many transitions in a kindergarten program and capable of making good choices.

More importantly, educators evaluated children's activity choices in relation to the kindergarten prototype. Teachers expected typically developing children to choose a variety of activities over the course of the school year. Those who self-limited their activities probably had some kind of developmental deficit. Rhonda, a teacher at Oliver Heights Nursery School, used Mick's choices of blocks and dinosaurs as validation of his parents' decision to delay kindergarten entry:

> What I saw about Mick last year was a very happy child. He spent almost his whole year playing in the blocks with the animals. He loves dinosaurs. And so the dinosaurs and the blocks were his security. It wasn't until the end of March that he started branching out in the room a little bit....You know, he didn't blossom a lot, but he would get up and do a lot of observing. But you need to know that by that time the rest of the children were really on a roll. They were secure in going and doing a lot of other big-time playing. And he had missed that part. He was very open to having other kids come in and play with him. He really liked it. But the thing that I thought was interesting was that he did the *same play over and over*. You know, that was his security, with the blocks and the dinosaurs. (Rhonda, Mick's teacher, RS)

Rather than seeing strong preferences for one type of activity as an expression of strength or specialization (in fact, some use focused interest as an indicator of giftedness), it was interpreted as a weakness. It was perseveration—either developmentally immature or potentially deviant. Teachers prided themselves on luring children into new activities, of helping children expand their horizons. But these choices were clearly directed by the teachers. There was a strong bias against boys who chose the blocks and worries about boys not choosing the art area. Given that all the teachers were white, middle-class women, it is hard not to put a gendered spin on this evaluation.

In many ways, a focus on independence was related to teacher concern about rigors of the next-grade curriculum. The preschool teachers framed their practice as readying their children for the big, less-kind kindergarten, while the kindergarten teachers oriented their students to a much more structured first grade designed for more independent learners. This year's child was read through next year's interpretations:

> When he's expected to function on his own, and sit and do work without distracting a lot of other kids, that's gonna be a real challenge for him. It's gonna be really hard I think for him—they get into the guided reading groups, so there's gonna be a lot of situations where the expectation is that you need to handle yourself. And you need to sit and concentrate for longer periods of time, and that I think is gonna be hard for him. (Wendy Connor, Larry's kindergarten teacher, AM)

A theme that we found threaded through both the maturity and work habit discussions is that prototypical kindergartners do not need the teacher. They get along with others; they solve their own problems; they do their work. The gold standard is someone for whom the teacher is pretty irrelevant. In fact, one teacher described her group in the second semester of the year as distancing themselves from her:

> Well, they're much more independent workers. They're much more self-sufficient. We can accomplish a lot more during the course of a day.... They do things without me having to tell them to do them. You know, they know the routine.... So, yeah, they've come a long way. (Lacy Newberry, Paula's teacher, RK)

As we listened to these teachers, we wondered if children are being pushed away from their teachers by these expectations of independence. Are teachers losing the role of social facilitators as they work with children who have had more preschool experience or who are older and less needy? Being independent and having the ability to make good choices is an important developmental milestone, but it is variable across children and something that is teachable by skilled professionals.

Discussion

In this paper, we worked to understand how children experience our notions about development, particularly as they relate to the practice of the gift of time. Specifically, we explored how children who shared general readiness risks were differently interpreted and inducted into schooling. Through our work with redshirts, agemates, and retainees, we saw how profoundly notions of typical development shaped philosophies and pedagogy.

Virtually all the early childhood settings in which we worked were known locally as high-quality, developmentally oriented contexts. Working to understand how children were classified as ready or not, we found that these parents, teachers, and administrators had strongly held notions of appropriate behavior, skills, size, and dispositions. Guided by a normative conception of the typical kindergartner, they formed standards against which children were judged. Simultaneously, all teachers had a coherent sense of programming appropriate for a particular child—the prototypical kindergartner. Pursuing programming for the typical, they lost sight of the rich variability of children who are kindergarten age. Children who were small, socially immature, focused on one activity, or who needed a nap did not fit this image of a kindergartner, and the response was limited to the "gift of time." This pseudo-adaptation to a different developmental timetable amounted to shifting the age cohort in which the children lived their educational lives.

We found in these contexts a concrete embodiment of the concerns noted in the most recent guidelines for developmentally appropriate practice:

> Likewise, educational institutions continue to be structured in ways that give insufficient recognition to or adaptation for individual differences. There is a fundamental disconnect between knowing that children are different and expecting them all to learn in the same way at the same time. (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997, p. 39)

Even after 25 years of attention and discussion, the local implementation of developmental programming is still highly normative, with attention to typical development the primary concern and the evaluation of individuals relative to that standard second. As a result, children are shut out and made less of than their older, larger, more cooperative peers.

We think it might be helpful to highlight within developmental approaches something that was always there but that can be lost in the shuffle—*developmentally responsive practice*—by building on what we know about child development and articulating the responsive act of teaching in concrete ways. When we think about working in developmentally responsive ways, it may just be that the gift of time is too generic to support the development of individual or groups of children. Motivated by a notion of a kindergarten prototype, the gift of time does not address specific needs or promote agency in teachers. We advocate

more responsive approaches built on strong teacher knowledge and action for specific children. If children are not ready for our programming, it speaks more about our inability to be inclusive and respond to their needs than to their particular skills and development.

Notes

1. We indicate a student's extra year status with the following initials: RS—redshirt, RK—retained kindergarten, AM—agemate.

2. We are aware that documents are not the final truth. What we find interesting about this case is that no one provided any evidence that the birth certificates were wrong beyond the body of Paula herself. She didn't fit the image of a 5-year-old; therefore, she couldn't be 5.

3. Gredler notes that teachers across the world complain about the youngest children in their group, regardless of the entry age (Gredler, 1992).

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